



## City of Seattle Seattle Planning Commission

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Barbara Wilson,  
Executive Director  
Casey Mills,  
Planning Analyst

May 27, 2008

Honorable Councilmember Tom Rasmussen  
Chair, Parks and Seattle Center Committee  
Seattle City Council  
PO Box 34025  
Seattle, WA 98124-4025

### **RE: Recommendations on Seattle Center's Master Plan**

Dear Councilmember Rasmussen,

The Seattle Planning Commission is an independent volunteer body that advises city officials on broad goals, policies and plans for the physical development of the City. The Planning Commission is pleased to provide you with our comments and recommendations on the proposed Seattle Center Master Plan.

The Commission has focused its review on two areas; transportation connectivity and the adjacent land use.

### **GENERAL COMMENTS:**

The final recommendations and Master Plan for the Seattle Center, developed by the Century 21 Committee, creates a compelling vision for a critically important element of Seattle's urban fabric and experience. We agree that developing more open space in the city, especially downtown, is essential.

The Seattle Center is important to both Seattle and to the region. As a regional and local destination mobility and connectivity is essential. Pedestrian, bike, and transit connections to surrounding neighborhoods, nearby landmarks, and the region need to be top priorities for the master plan.

Seattle is a growing city and as such we strongly recommend that the land use and zoning surrounding Seattle Center be examined in conjunction with the master plan. The areas directly adjacent to the Center provide a great opportunity for significant increases in residential density. Those new households could take advantage of the superb open space and amenities that the Center offers and proximity to the central business district and Theater District.

### **SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS:**

#### **Transportation Infrastructure and Strategies**

- More opportunities for getting on and off the bus near Seattle Center should be provided. Bus facilities could be improved near the Center.

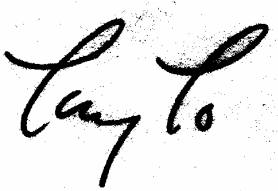
- Regardless of the outcome regarding Aurora Avenue, a pedestrian/bike overpass should improve connectivity to the East.
- The edges of the Center are one of its greatest weaknesses, as they make it difficult to locate entry points. The only real examination of improving the edges has been Memorial Stadium, and the new proposal creates the same sort of problem. Portals need to be more welcoming and visible to make the Center more permeable and to create a better sense of place and identity.
- Walking to and from the Center to surrounding neighborhoods to the East and South is not comfortable, convenient, direct or safe. Pedestrian connections and access should be prioritized, and connections to downtown need to be enhanced. In particular, pedestrian access to and from the East and South must be improved, particularly connections between the Center and Downtown, South Lake Union and Capitol Hill. Connections between the waterfront, Sculpture Park, and other open space near the Center should also be a top priority.
- When exploring projects such as SR 99 and a Mercer Street the city should look for opportunities to create better pedestrian connections to the Center.
- Pedestrian elements should be unified with design elements. Pedestrian infrastructure, including sidewalks, lighting and crossings, should all be improved along the pedestrian corridors leading in to the Center. World class wayfinding to and within the site is necessary.
- The Center should reexamine its prohibition of biking through the campus. A cross-campus bicycle connection through the center could improve the city's bike network considerably, and should be considered.
- Expansion of the Seattle Streetcar network to include service to the Center will better enhance connectivity to other Seattle destinations, landmarks, and neighborhoods.
- The likely conversion of Mercer Street to two ways should incorporate opportunities for enhancing connection to the Center.

### **Zoning and Density**

- Allowable densities and heights should be increased around the edges of the Center, both due to the presence of nearby open space and public transit for residents and for the potential benefits additional residents in the area could provide the Center.
- The Theatre District in particular would be a prime opportunity for increased density, as it represents a desirable place to live. The City should look to New York's Central Park as an example of successful high density neighborhoods abutting open space
- The current 40 foot height limits applicable to land adjacent to the North edge of Seattle Center should be reexamined in order to better achieve mixed use compact development appropriate for this area. The City should employ land use and economic tools and strategies to focus on the redevelopment of the vast amount of nearby surface parking lots.

We thank you for this opportunity to assist you in your work and hope that we can continue to provide independent expert review. In addition, we look forward to providing the Mayor and Council with assistance as the Master Plan preferred Alternative for Seattle Center moves forward. Please contact me or our Director, Barbara Wilson at (206) 684-0431, if you have further questions.

Tony To, Chair  
Seattle Planning Commission

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tony To". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Tony" and the last name "To" clearly distinguishable.

cc: Mayor Greg Nickels  
Seattle City Councilmembers  
Tim Ceis, Nathan Torgelson, Mayor's office  
Robert Nellams, Jill Crary, Layne Cubell, Seattle Center  
Diane Sugimura, John Skelton,, DPD  
Grace Crunican, Bob Powers, Tracy Krawczyk, SDOT  
Stella Chao, DON  
Rebecca Herzfeld, Christa Valles, Council Central Staff

**SEATTLE PLANNING COMMISSION RECORD OF DISCLOSURE & RECUSAL**

Commissioner Chris Fiori disclosed that his firm Heartland LLC works with the Seattle School District regarding memorial stadium.  
Commissioner Mark Johnson disclosed that his firm ESA Adolfson did the environmental review for Memorial Stadium for the Seattle School District.